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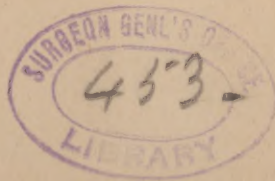
DOES SEGREGATION DIMINISH THE PREVA-
LENCE OF PULMONARY CONSUMPTION?

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THE February number of THE SANITARIAN contains a contribution from Dr. L. F. Flick, in which it is maintained that the separation of the consumptives from the healthy would "completely wipe out the disease in a single generation." Many of the views and conclusions which are expressed in this paper are, however, so much at variance with the facts as to entirely preclude the belief that any medical man who is at all familiar with the general statistical history of consumption during the last thirty years will be misled by it; and had it not appeared in THE SANITARIAN, a journal that is read by thousands of intelligent lay people, in whom it can only excite unnecessary alarm and work incalculable mischief, I should not undertake the disagreeable duty of briefly criticising it.

It can be safely said that a person's capacity for performing scientific work is always betrayed by the accuracy of the methods which he employs. Substantial research can hardly be said to consist in measuring the influence of one event on another by taking the first bearing of an observation twenty-five years after the conditions have ceased to operate. Yet this is precisely what Dr. Flick has done.

He details the history of the segregation of consumptives, which was vigorously practised by the Government of Naples from 1782 to about 1860 (for particulars of which I refer to his article, or to my address on "Hygiene," published in the Transactions of the Pennsylvania State Medical Society for 1890), and concludes, from an array of very recent statistics (1887), that this measure had the effect of stamping out this disease almost completely in the territory which was once known as the Kingdom of Naples. I am familiar with a number of other authors who have reflected and written on this strange episode in the sanitary history of Italy, but with none who ever reached the same singular conclusion. Brehmer (*Die Aetiologie der Chronischen Lungenschwindsucht*, p. 495) states: "Con-



cerning a diminution in the death-rate from pulmonary consumption in Naples and Portugal (where similar laws were enforced) the medical historians of that period are ignorant." According to Uffelmann (*Berliner Klin. Wochenschrift*, 1883, p. 369), Dr. de Renzi, the medical historian whom Dr. Flick quotes, states that the injury which had been inflicted on Naples by these laws was simply indescribable, and denounces the Neapolitan medical faculty in the severest terms for participating in their practical introduction.

Now, when Dr. Flick brings no evidence which was not also perfectly well known to his predecessors, and asks us to believe in the great beneficence of the operation of these laws from 1872 to 1860, simply because Naples shows a low consumption rate in the year 1887, he presumes too much on the simplicity of human nature. If he had consulted Vol. 45, p. 112, of the *British and Foreign Medico-Chirurgical Review* he would have found that Drs. Spatuzzi and Somma, "who have paid great attention to the mortuary returns in that city (Naples, about 1860), affirm that one-sixth, or a seventh of the whole mortality is due to phthisis," and that Dr. de Renzi " marvels greatly (in 1863) that the city of Naples is fully as much liable to phthisis as either London or Paris, though the salutary condition of the climate should render it far less common."

If the death-rate from consumption was the same in Naples at the time segregation ceased, as it was in other cities in which segregation was not practised, it is self-evident that such a measure can have no influence in diminishing the death-rate from this disease.

Dr. Flick ought to be aware that phthisis mortality is largely a matter of adaptation between man and his surroundings, and not one of contagion or isolation. Sanitary advances, better living, improved nutrition, and greater intelligence are the factors which lessen the deaths from phthisis in Europe as well as in our own country. Italy does not stand by itself in this respect. He admits himself that this may be lower in Spain, where no adhesion was ever given to such laws, so far as I know. According to Hirsch, some of the cantons of Switzerland have a death-rate which compares very favorably with that of Naples and of other Italian cities, and here isolation was never given a consideration.

The same is true of England. It is impossible that, as Dr. Flick teaches, the mere handful of consumptives which are accommodated in the consumption hospitals of England, and are thus isolated, can have the influence of reducing the death-rate from this disease 50 per cent among a population of 40,000,000 people. There is not a single American city of which we have statistics, that does not show a diminution of from 20 to 30 per cent in the mortality rate of this disease during the last 30 years, and we cannot boast of any hospitals where these patients are isolated.—*From THE SANITARIAN, April, 1891.*

